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AUTHOR von Gustedt, Ruth
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ABSTRACT

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SUPERVISING PARAPROFESSIONALS IN EXTENSION PROGRAMS

ruth von gustedt

EFNEP
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE
APPALACHIAN CENTER
WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY
MORGANTOWN

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INTRODUCTION

To the New Supervisor

Many books and papers have been written on the mechanics of supervision. But few of these materials deal with the concept of human relations and supervision.

The following pages look into the humaneness of supervision -- a necessary ingredient for successful supervisory skill.

What is supervision and what has supervision to do with human relations?

Supervision is an important factor in our work and relationships with our co-woekers, particularly paraprofessionals and volunteers.

The term supervision has its origin in two Latin words:

super which means "above"

video which means "I see"

So together, the Latin means "I see above." If we look in the dictionary we will find many definitions for supervision, such as: "direction, inspection, and critical evaluation." However, not much is said about the supervision of personnel.

Supervision in Extension is devised to improve people-related work and the work of professionals and paraprofessionals. It promotes, stimulates, and fosters personnel growth, welfare, and development by solving working problems.

From this point of view, supervision is primarily concerned with personnel and with physical facilities and equipment in so far as they affect the quality of a person's work. Supervision concerned with personnel is not "inspection" but it does utilize inspection. Where the connotation of supervision as inspection prevails, supervision is frequently called "snoopervision" and is of little value. Supervision is democratic in nature and is aware of the human element of each supervisee and respects that dignity at ali times. Proper supervision is based upon a sound philosophy, has a set of values and aims, and constantly evaluates them.

Democratic supervisory leadership is characterized by cooperation in the formation of policies and procedures, in the handling of conflicts and problems, and in the enjoyment of desirable accomplishments. A "we" rather than an "I" spirit is in constant evidence.

Now where does the Human Relations part come in?

Human Relations teach us the "how" of living and acting together in a social and professional life. But mainly they teach us understanding, psychological rules, and techniques--why a person acts as he does and how to cope with all kinds of human behavior.

So, if I supervise, I need a knowledge of supervision, to know how to guide and counsel, and how to communicate with others.

What are the responsibilities of a supervisor for professionals and paraprofessionals?

If we look in Webster's Third New International Dictionary we find as a definition for supervisor:

"One that supervises a person, a group, department, agency, or operation."

This definition covers only an authoritarian way--there the boss, here the underling. But that is not what a supervisor in Extension should be or how she should act. A supervisor must work on an equal basis with those she supervises. She lends assistance to the paraprofessionals in their own development. The supervisor obtains the facilities necessary to do quality work. In addition, she offers advice, counseling, and the support needed to effect a working

environment characterized by harmony and a sense of general well-being and productivity.

We should be aware of bottlenecks that may occur in the channels of our relationships. A good supervisor will not have sporadic meetings, but planned ones where she discusses issues of common interest with the paraprofessionals. She concerns herself with the problems of the employees as far as it is really necessary, and she respects each employee as possesses human dignity comparable to her own.

Let me point out to you some interesting facts as to how personnel want to see their supervisors. For example, personnel may have much, little, or no character of their own, but they do want their supervisors to be men and women of strength and conviction. They want supervisors to be fearless in the face of what's right or wrong, to practice what they say when speaking of service, and to exemplify democratic principles in action. They want to respect their supervisor - and they will if we give them the chance.

It's not necessary that we know everything. If there is a problem we can't solve, or if there is subject matter we don't know, let's admit it and try to find out before the next meeting. For this we will be as well respected as for having the answers at our fingertips. Another characteristic that personnel want in their supervisor is the ability to recognize and utilize the special endowments or potentialities with which their personnel are gifted. We should give them a chance to use these talents.

One of the most important characteristics a supervisor should have is the ability to decrease tensions. She should try not to become angry or tense herself. The problem arises from the worker's fear of having failed or a feeling of insecurity. There may be an instance when a paraprofessional wants to boss the supervisor; in this case, the supervisor must draw the line. She must make a clear-cut decision, and explain the reasons for it.

How can supervision be of use in management?

What does "management" mean? According to Webster's Dictionary it means "the conducting or supervising of something." Also, it can mean handling, guiding, directing, and assisting in personnel and professional improvement and development.

In today's society most of us need a little bit of all these, especially when we have to play various roles the way you, as an agent, are supposed to do.

How does supervision help here?

A very important point in supervision is to control ourselves and to be honest with ourselves. Why didn't things get done as we wanted them? Why did we react so emotionally? Why did we run from one thing to another?

If the reason is anxiety or overwork or a lack of recognition for whatever we do or have already done, we should admit it to ourselves. Then, instead of feeling inefficient, angry, afraid, or disturbed about the situation - which is normal but does not lead anywhere -

try to get down to business. Schedule one job and finish it before scheduling another and you will find that a lot of other things will fall into place.

Having a monthly schedule which lists the items we want to accomplish puts us at ease and leaves us freer for other duties. Having worked out such a schedule for ourselves will enable us to teach management to our paraprofessional personnel.

Our personnel, who sometimes make our life hard because of their disorganized management, are easier to understand when proper supervision enables us to compare management practices and thus realize that the personnel want acknowledgement and help. You, as a Home Demonstration Agent, with your experiences in group relationships with the family and other institutions of society and your work on an individual basis, are well prepared to work with both professional and non-professional workers on the difficult one-to-one basis and to cope with the management of various roles and duties.

Here are a few suggestions for success in practical work and time management.

1. There should be a carefully planned schedule. Instructions should always be given clearly, concisely, and completely. This includes telling the personnel the "why" as well as the "what."

2. When we have a schedule lined out, we should keep it. Say "no" to other things which come up. Whatever comes up can usually be rescheduled. If a day or month is carefully outlined in advance, we go from one assignment to another promptly and confidently.

3. If a day or month is left largely to its own devices, we putter along aimlessly, seemingly busy, but at the end we have accomplished little, or not enough, or the wrong things.

4. Planning by a supervisor is of utmost importance for she must think of her personnel, her group, and her total job. Her well-planned days and months bring dividends in increased achievement and decreased fatigue and disinterest among the personnel and herself.

5. When a supervisor is always clear about what her personnel has to do next, they will have a greater respect for her and a more lively interest in their work. They get the "so important" feeling that they are part of an organization designed for a particular job that is being well done. This gives personal satisfaction combined with a feeling of importance and belonging.

Supervision and on-the-job guidance

The important concepts and philosophy of supervision concerning our work are:

1. To help people arrive at their full potential.
2. To work toward acceptance of each other.
3. To give security, belonging, guidance, and council.
4. To work toward good results.
5. To have love for wisdom, for the well being of others and for the personal development of ourselves and others.

Philosophy is a great force. It caused the early Christians to die rather than surrender their faith. It is the force that creates and maintains the culture of a civilization.

What implications have these considerations for supervision?

They show us that people who are engaged in education, guidance, and development of personnel should work toward compassion for mankind and pass this on through their influence, guidance, leadership, counseling, and work.

We have three areas where guidance for personnel is necessary.

1. The work area.
2. The area of development of personnel.
3. The private life of personnel in so far as it overlaps the work area.

1. What is guidance in the work area?

Guidance means to teach a person the knowledge necessary to do a job well. The teaching must be done in a firm but friendly manner.

We must patiently help the worker when she isn't able to learn fast. Do not force her or get impatient. Where a mistake has been made, we should be able to help in such a way that the worker doesn't become afraid or insecure. If she does, there is no success. She may start behaving defensively, which will lead no where.

We have to consider that all people do not have the same abilities and that workers are not equally efficient from 8 to 5. Observation, study, and experience prove that this is true. For us, the supervisors, this means that we should always be flexible, alert, perceptive, and able to work with each person differently.

2. Development of personnel.

Development of personnel will be successful only if interaction is possible and if the worker has the freedom to express herself without running the risk of being misunderstood.

This means that free interaction between supervisor and staff should take place at any time. In providing guidance, for example, if the supervisor has to question or discuss a tough situation, the worker should have the opportunity to solve the problem under the guidance of the supervisor.

3. The third area, the personal affairs of a worker, is a difficult one.

It's not our task to supervise the private life, or married life, of our personnel. We only have the right to interfere in so far as it overlaps into the work of a person and causes a disturbance.

For instance, a person works in the evening because she thinks it's necessary and because she couldn't accomplish during the day what she wanted to or thought she should have. This may interfere with the needs of a husband and children in the home and could lead to marital problems. The supervisor's duty is to look into the employee's work schedule in order to come to an understanding as to how to combine work and family life satisfactorily. The supervisor should keep in mind that the worker wants to do her best, but in some cases she needs help to do her job better. From this insight a fruitful solution can come.

Counseling and advising under supervision.

The agent's task is different from the aide's.

The agent is the professional by education and thus the authority on the subject matter. By her job description, she is also supervisor of the paraprofessional staff. This clearly puts the agent in the role of guide, counselor, and advisor. Webster's dictionary lists many interpretations of counseling and advising. Here are a few which I consider meaningful.

Counseling and advising can be

"Interchange of opinion."

"Deliberation, discussion, consultation."

"Consideration of a fact or a situation."

Here are some suggestions on counseling and relating to people:

1. In order to be successful, we have to find out in a conversational meeting what it is that another person wants; that is, her or his basic social and psychological needs. If we help to provide these needs, this can help the people we supervise to have personal satisfaction and a productive job experience.

2. We must be wholly aware that all persons DO have social, psychological, and emotional needs that are just as intense and demanding as the need for food and sleep. These needs are those of belonging, recognition, understanding, and security.

   Educators and supervisors must learn to satisfy these needs in daily operations and contacts, especially in counseling and advising sessions.

3. In each counseling session credit, appreciation, and encouragement should be given. Before a supervisor intends to make a change she should discuss it with those who will be affected.

4. If a person cannot be convinced that something is necessary for the job, do not use your authority to make her do it. If possible, let her try out her own idea under close supervision. If you have to use your authority, which means a necessary clear-cut decision, make it clear why this is so and that it is not a personal matter. All personnel are inclined to take everything personally.

5. It is important in counseling to cut the red tape and just be a human being, but without giving your technique away.

6. Changes which have to be made shouldn't be done quickly. Human nature always rebels at drastic changes. For one thing, most of us are afraid of change.

7. Always keep an open mind about everything related to people. Be aware that personnel naturally regard the power structure with some awe and are inclined to give in too easily or to withhold important points because of fear. For example, they think they might lose the position or not be liked anymore. It's up to us as supervisors to put our co-workers at ease and to assure them that a counseling session is only to discuss improvement and has nothing to do with grading, "likes," or "dislikes." The best assurance for them will be that you are convinced of this. Then you can freely act out your conviction on this basis.

Supervision and Problem-Solving

When we ask people how things are going, we usually get the stereotype answer with little or no conviction in the voice:

"Oh, fine, thank you, everything has worked out fine, no trouble."

This just isn't true on the professional level. There is always something that bothers us, or makes us anxious, unhappy, or sometimes depresses us to a degree that we think we are not able to take the next step, or pursue the right procedures.

Many factors cause problems. Here are some of the most important and most frequent ones.

1. Individual differences among personnel in interest, capacity, abilities, and lack of insight and understanding of changes.
2. Outdated policies, procedures, and guides.
3. Ill health on the part of personnel.
4. Undesirable personal characteristics, with special attention to attitudes.

For example: The disgruntled who undermines general good will, the kidder and apple-polisher who obtains special considerations not available to all, and the braggart.

5. Failure to relate to other people.
6. Jealousy.
7. Feelings of inadequacy.
8. Anxiety.

Practically all problems a supervisor is confronted with fall in one or another of these catagories. If we are able to identify and recognize the cause of a problem we are well on the way to solving it. Perhaps we can see signs and symptoms of a problem and try to develop preventive measures. But in spite of all cautions there always will be problems which occur, and the first step in solving them is to recognize their existence. We have to deal with major problems and minor problems. The big emergency problems call for immediate action. The minor problems don't require fast action, but it is good strategy to handle them as quickly as possible so that they will not become large ones. Someone once said:

> "Big problems may weigh heavily upon us, but it's the little problems that become as grains of sand in our shoes and wear us out."

To solve a problem we need to be "in the know" about the following points:

1. A clear statement of the problem.
2. Observation and analysis of the problem.
3. Knowledge about the worker's attitude and character.
4. A discussion with the person, but no arguing.

   (Arguments are seldom won, they merely tend to make each party sure of its own rightness.)
5. Deal with facts only.
6. Act on what's right - not on "who is right."
7. Opposition builds up when we try just to "win a point."

However, a number of precautions have to be observed in solving problems:

1. Be careful in seeking a panacea for all and everything.
2. Not all problems are capable of full solution, but giving them time and thought may be a help.
3. Too rapid analysis of problems and acting on hunches rather than on a total knowledge of the factors will lead to errors in solution; but the opposite is also true.

   For example: Prolonged analysis and never coming forth with workable guides may prove frustrating and costly to all concerned.
4. Unless personnel can adapt to a policy of willingness to change their minds and to abandon errors in judgment for better solutions, the labor involved in problem solving may prove to be in vain. But, we should always try several times to reach a co-worker and get his or her cooperation.

In problem solving any indication of dogmatism by the supervisor prohibits productive thinking and discussion. Supervisors should be open-minded. They should realize the need for consulting several sources rather than being dependent upon one view of a situation or person. Dogmatism makes this impossible.

"Happiness is a stopping place between too much and too little."

SUPERVISION - COMBINED WITH COUNSELING, COMMUNICATION, AND HUMAN RELATIONS.

In our efforts to help disadvantaged people we are exposed to many frustrations and disappointments. A comparison of efforts put into our work and the results achieved shows quite a difference between our disadvantaged target group and the middle-class target group.

This difference is sometimes so discouraging that it makes professionals feel unable to continue the work. A professional may begin to doubt her capability or capacity. Questions arise as to whether it is in vain to continue the work with this special target group because they are so difficult to handle and so hard to reach and to improve.

To improve and to help people has always been and always will be a difficult task.

However, when we work with disadvantaged people, we have to cope with a few more obstacles than usual.

We, as professionals, are used to working with middle-class people who are willing to learn, to participate. Their lives are more or less financially secure, they are a part of the community and its social life. They are adjusted to the "American way of life." If we work with these people individually or in a group, there is no big difference in attitude, philosophy, or social level compared with our own.

All try to get along with each other, to please, and to participate in offered programs. We are accepted as leaders and the audience is socially oriented. If we lecture to such a group on whatever subject, each individual is able to learn, to make the necessary mental or thought association, which enables people to practice what they have been taught. To do so, energy, hope, mental and emotional strength, and balance are necessary.

Any work or any teaching to disadvantaged people is different. Disadvantaged people lack a lot of the abilities that are associated with the middle-class.

In order to supervise and provide the right guidance for the para-professional who works with the disadvantaged, the supervisor needs to know about all the obstacles and their causes which prevent disadvantaged people from participating and cooperating.

WHAT ARE THESE OBSTACLES?

I. People who do not have enough money are exposed to a lot of frustrations.

a. Worries and anxieties.

For example: How do I pay the bills, feed the kids? How do I cope with an emergency? What am I going to do? I can't afford a doctor

b. The environment

A disadvantaged couple's struggle is finally determined to be just a day-by-day existence. In being forced to do so they lose the ability to plan ahead or participate

socially. They can look at life only for today. Their circumstances have removed hope; they have no source of encouragement. These facts are much more emphasized if a homemaker is without husband or if we have to deal with an unmarried mother.

c. The struggle disadvantaged people go through changes their behavior. The anti-social behavior is based on their past struggles, lack of success, and defense mechanisms.

For example: As fear, poverty, and hardships increase, their socializing skills are decreased.

Aggression, hopelessness, rejection, and physical and emotional tiredness increase.

And society, which does not understand their attitude and behavior, reacts with rejection also.

II. There are manifold causes for being disadvantaged. They can be:

Congenital

Environmental

Psychological (character)

Bad luck

Physical

or a combination of these.

III. Man's inhumanity to man.

There are always other people involved in a person's life who are causing trouble for him or adding to the trouble already there. This is a serious problem among men, and creates most of the frustrations an anxieties. It decreases people's chances of reaching their full potential and open communication. It increases suspicion, and builds up a screen and a guard against each other.

Disadvantaged people experience this more, and suffer much, which adds to the creation of rejection, aggressiveness, tiredness, suspicion, and decreasing hope in their lives. It even can lead into depression.

This is the group we are working with. Their attitudes or values are acquired during years in their families and through life experiences.

There is no formula which we can apply and which will work instantly. And, there is no psychological or Human Relations technique which can be applied and will work immediately. What has built up step by step can only be removed step by step.

Techniques of Human Relations or psychological rules are needed. However, they are only successful when we face a commitment to implement what we have heard and learned. That is, people who work with people must themselves be involved in a life-long helping, learning, or growing process, as Dr. Robert R. Carkhuff, Center for Human Relations in Community Affairs, American International College, says in his paper, "Helping and Human Relations." This is true of supervision also.

PRACTICAL ADVICE CONCERNING COUNSELING AND WAYS TO COMMUNICATE

1. Effective communication is based on trust.

> Trust is a two-way street. Not only does the supervisee have to trust us, but we have to trust her, too - trust in so far as she needs help, wants help, and is willing to try to change in spite of all obstacles.

2. Usually our efforts to communicate involve only technical skills in

Reading
Writing
Visuals
Speaking

But, in order to achieve real communication in supervision we should work on the social and psychological aspects of communication.

These include:

a. Building up a professional relationship. That means we have to work on being together as human beings and still maintain individuality.

b. Using non-verbal communication as a part of finding each other.

Non-verbal communication, however, is a tool, not a self-sufficient method in itself.

For example: We often talk to avoid real communication with someone. Non-verbal communication has to be practiced to avoid the talk-screen.

3. We have to become alert to what we communicate to others.

We don't listen objectively to what another person says, because everybody responds from his own conceptual standpoint.

4. We should make eye-contact. (It assures a person.)

People in trouble or depressed don't like to communicate or engage in eye contact.

5. In counseling, and listening to people, we have to be alert and look for the emotional connotation.

That is, people can talk about a matter but perhaps they don't talk about their feelings. We have to observe them.

A supervisor should try to find the underlying feeling and cause and respond to this.

Be most careful not to take everything at face value. We have to be perceptive.

6. In the back of our minds we have our own image which we build in our response to counseling people.

The first response has to be genuine to the person and his feelings; all the other steps come second. We have to find the right time to say the things we have to say.

7. Usually in our daily lives, especially in our daily office lives, we can detect that we have a

"stereotyped office behavior."

We develop mannerisms. But such behavior carried into a counseling session stops any progress.

Our response has to be genuine from one human being to another in order to gain trust.

8. Mannerisms, our own built-in image, and being so busy all the time, prevent us from hearing what a person really wants to tell us, and thus we cannot respond genuinely to the feeling of the person.

Applying these eight objectives with sincerity will help a supervisee become ready for change and ready to listen to us.

SUPERVISION--A SERVICE UNDER CONTROL OF THE SUPERVISOR.

How do service and control go together?

There are several definitions of service, according to Webster's Dictionary. For example:

> Conduct or performance that assists or benefits someone.
>
> To provide information and other assistance.
>
> An act of administering or applying something.

The adjective "serviceable" means:

> Ready or willing to help.

"Control" on the other hand means:

> To check and regulate.
> To verify by comparison.
> To direct influence over.
> To curb.
> To guide and direct.
> To direct or restrain domination.

Supervision as a service means to work toward understanding the supervisee's problems. It means finding out and taking into account the paraprofessional's temperament, reputation, personality, stability, and background.

A supervisor cannot understand the present when he does not take into account the person's make up, environment, and past. Environment, the past, and the sum total of a person's temperament, traits, and tendencies are reflected in her life and work.

Another important factor to be alert to is that in today's society, ruled by technological progress, "action" is the thing. Things have to happen immediately. We say or do something and expect favorable results immediately. This expectation may be realistic when we work with a computer or a machine, but not when we work with people.

People change and develop at their own speed, because they develop according to their insight, strength, willingness, and motivational situation supported by the supervisor's continuous assistance.

Let me give you an example from the medical field. A person has a disease and she consults her physician.

The physician's first step is to start with a verbal analysis, and then he follows up with a physical examination.

Translated into a supervisor's situation this means:

a. Taking into account temperament, background, and environment of the supervisee.

b. Checking carefully the actual problem situation right now.

The physician's second step would be to tell the patient what actions to take, to prescribe medication, and, very likely, depending on the severity of the case, the doctor will see the patient again soon.

Again, translated into the supervisor's situation, this means:

The supervisor explores and finds out together with the supervisee what caused the problem, what can be done, and assures the supervisee of his help and support.

A further step would be to have discussion sessions with the supervisee as needed.

The physician's medicine is only a means of helping the patient's body to overcome the disease, just as the supervisor's help and support is a means of motivating the supervisee toward solving her problems.

It takes time for the patient and her body to work toward health, and so the supervisor has to give time to the supervisee to readjust and develop. Pressure for fast action, or expecting immediate action, may be a deterrent in such a situation because pressure can lead to tension and aggression.

Even though time may be required for noticeable change, there must be continuous structure, planning, direction, and carrying through with the duties working people have to fulfill.

To provide effective supervisory leadership is not so much the ability to sway and handle people as it is the ability to guide them in the pooling and development of their resources toward a unified purpose. The supervisor needs the ability to lead.

A supervisor in control will have regular counseling sessions to talk about the program and necessary readjustments, and provide the supervisee with work insights. A supervisor in control must make decisions - decisions about actions which should or should not be taken in the educational program.

Remember, however, that no productive and effective supervision, or any other help, can be given or received unless the supervisor and supervisee are willing and ready to develop personally and accept facts. This is difficult to accept because mankind is more willing to accept technological solutions than to accept and apply psychological truths and implications.

In this category belongs the attempt to overcome and integrate one's disappointments and frustrations into a constructive attitude toward life and people. Without converting life's experiences and knowledge into an understanding attitude toward people and into logical thinking about cause and effect on a person's behavior, there can be very little effect. We remain on a very emotional and tense level about what we have been through and how people have behaved toward us which blindfolds us and puts stumbling blocks between us.

Furthermore, in the field of personal development and improvement belongs the ability to communicate in spite of past bad experiences.

Real communication is needed in supervision. People around us are very sensitive to the things we do and do not do. There is not much we do that they don't observe. We have to practice what we preach or nobody will take us seriously. Cooperation and communication win cooperation and communication.

We all have good and bad characteristics, and it is not necessary to be perfect. But what is necessary, from the very beginning, is a readiness to undergo a personal change and to learn and develop those attributes necessary to work effectively with people.